**PRINCESS ANNE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**STANDARDS-BASED GRADING FAQ**

**Q. Why is Princess Anne Middle School 6th Grade Science implementing standards-based grading?**

A. In the current strategic plan, VBCPS is focusing on 21st century education, which includes an emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and other key skills. The kinds of assignments that truly challenge students to develop those skills are typically performance-based, open ended assignments that are better evaluated by rubrics focusing on learning targets, or standards.

Additionally, Princess Anne Middle School is designated as a second-year Vanguard School for Balanced Assessment. This means PAMS is at the forefront of innovating assessment practices to ensure higher quality education. Standards-based grading is backed by significant research that demonstrates it improves the quality of learning for students. Standards-based grading is the future of assessment at the secondary level. It is not, however, a new way of doing things. Elementary schools have been using standards-based grading, particularly from grades K-2, for years.

Finally, we have been focused on the wrong things in the current grading system. Standards-based grading is designed to assess learning, or more specifically students’ progress toward pre-determined learning targets. It eliminates the impact of things ancillary to learning (e.g., returning forms signed, classroom behavior, etc.) from factoring into a student’s grade.

**Q. What is the purpose of standards-based grading?**

A. The primary purpose of standards-based grading is to evaluate students at the highest level of learning they are able to demonstrate through the evidence of their work. Each assignment a student completes is associated with a learning target, and the students’ work is scored on a rubric relative to that learning target. The emphasis is on providing students the opportunity to produce a body of evidence to demonstrate their learning over time. They are provided motivation by being given opportunities to improve. A grade is not assigned until the student has demonstrated their highest level of learning.

In this system, teachers are better able to differentiate instruction because they are more precisely able to target students’ strengths and weaknesses. Hence, they can plan for and provide intervention for students who are struggling with concepts, or enrichment to students who are demonstrating mastery. Because non-learning factors are removed from consideration, the standards-based grading system places a value on the quality of student work rather than on the quantity of it.

**Q. What is the process teachers will use to implement standards-based grading?**

A. Standards-based grading begins with collaborative planning by the teachers. They work together to identify the learning targets, or standards, that are most important for a given unit. They approach the initial planning with the question, “What must students know, understand, and do as a result of this unit of study?”

Once the learning targets are determined, the teachers work to develop rubrics that will be used to evaluate student work. The rubrics typically evaluate students at five levels where a 0 reflects no evidence, a 1 reflects an emerging understanding, a 2 reflects a developing understanding, a 3 reflects proficiency, and a 4 reflects mastery.

Using the rubrics, the teachers provide formative feedback to the students, and they are given the opportunity to improve, either by enhancing the already graded assignment or by completing additional assignments that target the same learning goals. At the end of a quarter or unit of study, the students are graded at their highest level of learning.

*Example: If a student has two assignments that target the same standard and scores a 1 on the first assignment, but a 3 on the second assignment, the student’s grade on the standard will be a 3. The two assignments are not averaged.*

**Q. What will parents see?**

A. In Parent Portal, parents will see two types of grades: assignment grades and standards grades. Students will receive a score of 0-4 on each assignment they complete, and that grade will be recorded in the gradebook. Each standard will be measured by multiple assignments, so a parent will also see a standard grade as well, which will also be 0-4.

Parents should keep in mind that some assignments are higher level than others, and so will affect the evaluation of the standard differently. In the same way that in the old system a quiz does not count as much as a test, in a standards-based system a knowledge level quiz will not have as much bearing as a lab that requires students to apply knowledge and problem solve.

Teachers determine the number of standards at the beginning of each unit, and maintain student work in portfolios. This way, they are able to keep evidence of a student’s learning growth over time. However, teachers will send assignments home for parents to view, as well as periodically sending portfolios home. Portfolios must be returned to the school as they serve as the basis for evaluating the standards.

**Q. How does standards-based grading work?**

A. As stated before, grades on assignments are not averaged in a standards-based system. In fact, the assignment grades themselves do not have weight. Each assignment targets a different level of thinking, and hence a different level of mastery. Parents will see letter grades next to each assignment in Parent Portal. Those letter grades should be disregarded. Instead, the assignments will reflect student growth over time, and the grade for the standard will be given once all evidence is collected. A student’s grade on each standard will reflect the highest level of learning they were able to demonstrate through evidence relative to the expectations expressed through the rubrics the teachers have developed for each standard.

At the end of each quarter a student’s grade is determined using a total points scale. The only points that are counted are the points the students earned on each standard. A final letter grade is determined at the end of the quarter using a conversion of points to corresponding letter grades.

*EXAMPLE: In a given unit, five standards are evaluated. A student earns the following points on the standards: 3, 2, 3, 4, 3. This gives the student 15 points out of a possible 20. Using the conversion, the student earns a B+ for the quarter.*

The conversion scale is as follows (if there are 5 standards, multiply the values below by 5):

A 3.4-4.0 B- 2.3-2.4 D 0.8-1.5

A- 3.2-3.3 C+ 2.1-2.2 E 0.0-0.7

B+ 3.0-3.1 C 1.8-2.0

B 2.5-2.9 C- 1.6-1.7

**Q. What is different about standards-based grading from a traditional grading system?**

A. Standards-based graded places the focus on learning rather than behavior. It places focus on process rather than on product. It means every assignment students complete is purposeful (no busy work!). It means a grade does not come until the end of a unit of study. It makes it hard for a student to fail, but also challenging to receive an A, which should reflect true mastery of content and concepts.

**Q. What is the same about standards-based grading and a traditional grading system?**

A. The same curriculum is taught. The same high expectations apply. The Virginia Standards of Learning are still embedded. Many of the same instructional strategies will be used, though there will be a greater emphasis on performance-based work.

**Q. What do I look for?**

A. As you look at your student’s scores and work, look to see they are showing evidence of learning. Look for growth over time. Look for connections between student work and the stated learning targets. Learn to ask different questions, for example, What evidence is missing, What standards need more evidence, Based on feedback what must you do to improve?

Keep in mind, the standards-based grading system will require a different mindset and approach. It does not, however, have a direct impact on student achievement one way or the other. Your students will still be graded on the quality of their work, just as they always have. What the standards-based approach allows teachers to do is provide better quality feedback to students, identify students’ strengths and weaknesses more effectively, and place the focus for assessment where it should be: on learning.

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| **Work is complete and meets or exceeds the expectations of the assignment.  There is extensive evidence that the student made an effort to clarify her/his understanding of the purpose of the assignment.  The student uses comments on homework to improve future work.** | | **Work is complete and meets all expectations for the assignment.  There is evidence that the student made an effort to understand the purpose of the assignment.** | | **Work is incomplete.  There is little evidence that the student made an effort to understand the purpose of the assignment.** | | **There is no evidence that the student tried to understand the purpose of the assignment.** | | **There is not enough information to make a judgment.** | |  |
| **4=N** | | **3=DP** | | **2=P** | | **1=AP** | | **0=NE** | |  |
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